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President Bush

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Continuity and Change in U.S.-Korean Relations

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Following is an address by President Bush before the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, February 27, 1989.

I stand in your assembly as Presidents Eisenhower, Johnson, and Reagan have stood before me, and I reaffirm, as they did, America's support, friendship, and respect for the Republic of Korea and its people. As a former member of a body like this—of the House of Representatives of the United States—I take particular pleasure in coming back to this legislative chamber where the freely elected representatives of Korea's own democratic success story meet to debate and implement the will of the Korean people. I know there must be times when this body—just like the U.S. Congress—is full of noise and contention and emotion. But that is the sound of democracy at work, and we wouldn't have it any other way. As the great statesman Winston Churchill once said, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all others."

This is my first major address on foreign soil since becoming the 41st President of the United States of America. And my visit here today reflects the importance that I place on the relations between our two countries, the strength of our nations' ties, and the promise that our relationship holds for the future of the world.

My inauguration as President a month ago represented a tradition in the United States that speaks of both continuity and change. Continuity and change will also be the guideposts of relations between the United States and Korea in the years ahead. Where change is needed or inevitable, let us be a positive force for change. Where continuity is our mandate, let us go forward resolute in our commitment to freedom and democracy. Throughout, let our close economic and strategic relationship remain as it is—a pillar of peace in East Asia.

I first came to the Asian Pacific region during World War II, more than 45 years ago. I was a teenager—19 years old. I was flying torpedo bombers in the U.S. Navy. And it was then, for the first time in my life, that I truly appreciated the value of freedom and the price that we pay to keep it. Believe me, I have never forgotten.

In the early years following World War II, the future of Korea, and of all Asia, was very much in doubt. It was a time of great struggle between Korea's hope for freedom, Korea's hope for prosperity, and the twin menaces of war and invasion. On a June morning in 1950, the communist army of the North smashed into the Republic of Korea, intent on destroying your nation. And without hesitation or delay, American and UN forces rushed to your aid, and together Americans and Koreans fought side by side for your right to determine your own future.

And I do remember the devastation of your country. Your cities lay in rubble. Your factories were in shambles. Millions of your people wandered the streets homeless and hungry. And in 1951, in the midst of the war, Gen. Douglas MacArthur addressed a joint session of our Congress; he spoke of Korea, saying—here's his quote—"The magnificence of the courage and fortitude of the Korean people defies description." And as he spoke those words, our Congress interrupted him with applause, sustained applause, for you and your people. And after the war, you overcame every imaginable hardship.

History will long record your story; how in less than a generation you stepped into the light of liberty and economic opportunity. You can be proud of the miracle that you've achieved, and we are proud to be associated with you.

Korea: A Rising Nation

Today, Korea is a rising nation; a vibrant, dynamic nation; a nation riding the crest of the wave of the future. And never before has the pride and the progress of your nation been more evident than last summer, when this magnificent city played host to the 24th Olympic Games. Nearly 10,000 athletes from 160 nations were here. Another 3 billion people watched on television. And what they saw, from the moment Sohn Ki Keung carried the torch into your Olympic stadium until the last embers of the Olympic flames were extinguished at the closing ceremonies, was

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an incredibly spectacular sports festival. You played host to the world, and what a truly gracious host you were. Congratulations.

The past several years have witnessed the emergence of the entire Asian Pacific region. My trip—beginning in Japan, stopping in China, and concluding here in Korea—stands as testimony to the reality and what it means to the future of the world. Today Asia is one of the most dynamic areas on earth economically, politically, and diplomatically. And the Republic of Korea stands at the fore. You're a world-class economic power. Your commitment to democracy is demonstrated daily right here in this chamber. And your bold diplomacy, your *Nord Politik* [policy of relaxing tensions toward North Korea, China, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe] is reshaping relations in and beyond the Asian Pacific region.

Maintaining Freedom and Democracy

In my meetings with Prime Minister Takeshita of Japan, China's Deng Xiaoping and the three other top leaders, and with you and your leaders, I've discussed challenging bilateral global and regional issues, and our discussions have been marked at all times by a spirit of friendship and cooperation. I've come here today as the leader of a faithful friend and a dependable ally. And I'm here today to ensure that we work together in all things. Our most important mission together is to maintain the freedom and democracy that you fought so hard to win. As President, I am committed to maintaining American forces in Korea, and I am committed to support our mutual defense treaty.

There are no plans to reduce U.S. forces in Korea. Our soldiers and airmen are here at the request of the Republic of Korea to deter aggression from the North, and their presence contributes to the peace and stability of Northeast Asia. They will remain in the Republic of Korea as long as they are needed and as long as we believe it is in the interest of peace to keep them there.

In the years ahead, we must work together as equal partners to meet the evolving security needs of the Korean Peninsula. Peace through strength is a policy that has served the security interests of our two nations well, and we must complement deterrence with an active diplomacy in search of dialogue with our adversaries, including North Korea. The American people share your goal of peaceful unification on terms acceptable to the Korean people. It is for that reason that we actively support the peaceful initiatives of President Roh—to build bridges to the north—and I will work closely with the President to coordinate our efforts to draw the North toward practical, peaceful, and productive dialogue to ensure that our policies are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

I have spoken of the need for vigilance, strength, and diplomacy to deter aggression and preserve peace. There is another source of strength, and it is well represented in this assembly. The development of democratic political institutions is the surest means to build the national consensus that is the foundation of true security; just as we must work together to achieve better security within a democratic framework, we must also work together to achieve greater economic prosperity within the system of free and open international trade.

Progress of the Korean Economy

The progress of the Korean economy is an inspiration for developing countries throughout the world. By unleashing the energies and creativity of your talented people, you've led Korea into an era of unprecedented opportunity and prosperity. Korea has become an industrial power, a major trading power, and a first-class competitor. You're fulfilling the prophecy of the Indian poet [Rabindranath] Tagore who wrote, "Korea, once a bright light of the golden age of Asia, if it is relit it will be the light of the East." Korea has achieved great prosperity through participation in the international trading system. It has made the nations of free Asia the envy of the world, and all Koreans can take pride in what you as a people have achieved.

And yet, we also cannot overlook that your economic success has created concern in the management of our bilateral economic relations. For the American people, and for the Korean people as well, reducing our bilateral trade imbalance will be both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge will be to resist the calls for protectionism. The opportunity will be to expand the prosperity of both our countries. And we both—you and I—have a lot at stake. You are our seventh largest trading partner—larger than many of our traditional European partners—and our trade is growing. The United States is both Korea's largest market and second largest source of import. And we're also a leading source of the investment and technology that you will need to fuel further economic growth and development.

Korea's economy has benefited greatly from the free flow of trade. And yet today, in many countries, there is a call for greater protectionism. And I'm asking you to join the United States in rejecting these short-sighted pleas. Protectionism is fool's gold. Protectionism may seem to be the easy way out, but it is really the quickest way down. And nothing will stop the engine of Korea's economic growth faster than new barriers to international trade.

We've made progress in this area. American exports to Korea are up. Korean tariffs are down, and its nontariff barriers are down, too. And the service sector is opening. But let me be candid, and I want you to have this direct from me: if we are to keep our bilateral relationship growing even stronger, much more needs to be done. And I am confident that our two nations, working together, can accomplish the tasks still before us.

As one of the world's major trading powers, the Republic of Korea sets an example for other nations who are watching what you do. As an emerging economic leader, you inevitably shoulder important responsibilities to ensure the continued strength and stability of the global marketplace. You, the representatives of the Korean people, will face the challenge to improve living standards, to continue to open domestic markets, and to adopt appropriate international financial and exchange rate policies that reflect your standing as a prosperous and powerful trading nation.

The United States shares similar responsibilities for the well-being of the world economy. Our two peoples should, at all times, bear in mind that our trading system is truly an international joint venture, and that we share a special responsibility for its continued success.

Renewing the U.S. Commitment to Peace

My friends—and we are truly friends—I began today by talking about my inauguration as the new President of the United States of America, just a few

short weeks ago. The tradition of passing the torch of leadership from one American president to another is a time when we celebrate the strength of our democracy and a time when we renew our commitment to the values on which it is built.

Today, I am renewing my commitment to you as the leader of one sovereign state to the elected legislative body of another. I am renewing my commitment to you to work together for the good of our peoples and of all humanity. And as I reflect over the last 40 years of Asian history, the trend is remarkably positive. At the end of the Second World War, Asia lay in ruins. Through the 1950s and the 1960s, the forces of radical revolution at times appeared to be the wave of the future. And now, in the 1980s, human aspirations for basic political and economic freedoms have become almost universal. And as we gather here in your National Assembly, these aspirations are no longer a far off dream for your great country—for Korea. Instead, through your devotion and hard work, they have become a reality. And we celebrate your triumph. In the years ahead, the United States will stand with you, and we'll stand with you against the forces of oppression and for the forces of peace, prosperity, independence, and democracy. ■

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